

MIGRANT ARTISTS' MUTUAL AID

A Short History in Images

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About the Author

Jennifer Verson is a Doctoral Candidate at The Centre for Trust, Peace, and Social Relations at Coventry University where she holds a United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Studentship for her research "Performing Peace: Applied Performance and Scriptural Reasoning as a Peacebuilding Process." She is a Chicago-born live artist, writer, and cultural activist. She is Artistic Director of Migrant Artists Mutual Aid a Cross-national group of asylum-seeking women, men, migrant mothers and British mothers who work together to fight deportations, campaign for migration justice and support members of the group who are in the asylum system.



Photo by Manuel Vason and Migrant Artists Mutual Aid

I give more than I take.

I give more than I take.

I give more than I take.

“One minute, eyes closed left hands covering eyes, right hands holding each other repeating over and over again for one minute ‘I give more than I take.’”

I give more than I take.

I give more than I take.

I give more than I take.

“And what are your thoughts?”

Our survival is intertwined.

We are experimenting with new aesthetics of citizenship. We know what it sounds like when we sing, but what does it look like?

Can we visually re-imagine an expansive citizenship with justice at the centre?



Photo by Manuel Vason and Migrant Artists Mutual Aid



Photos by Manuel Vason and Migrant Artists Mutual Aid

“If you had to choose one part of your body that captures your essence what would it be?

Write on this part of your body

We are equal diversity.”

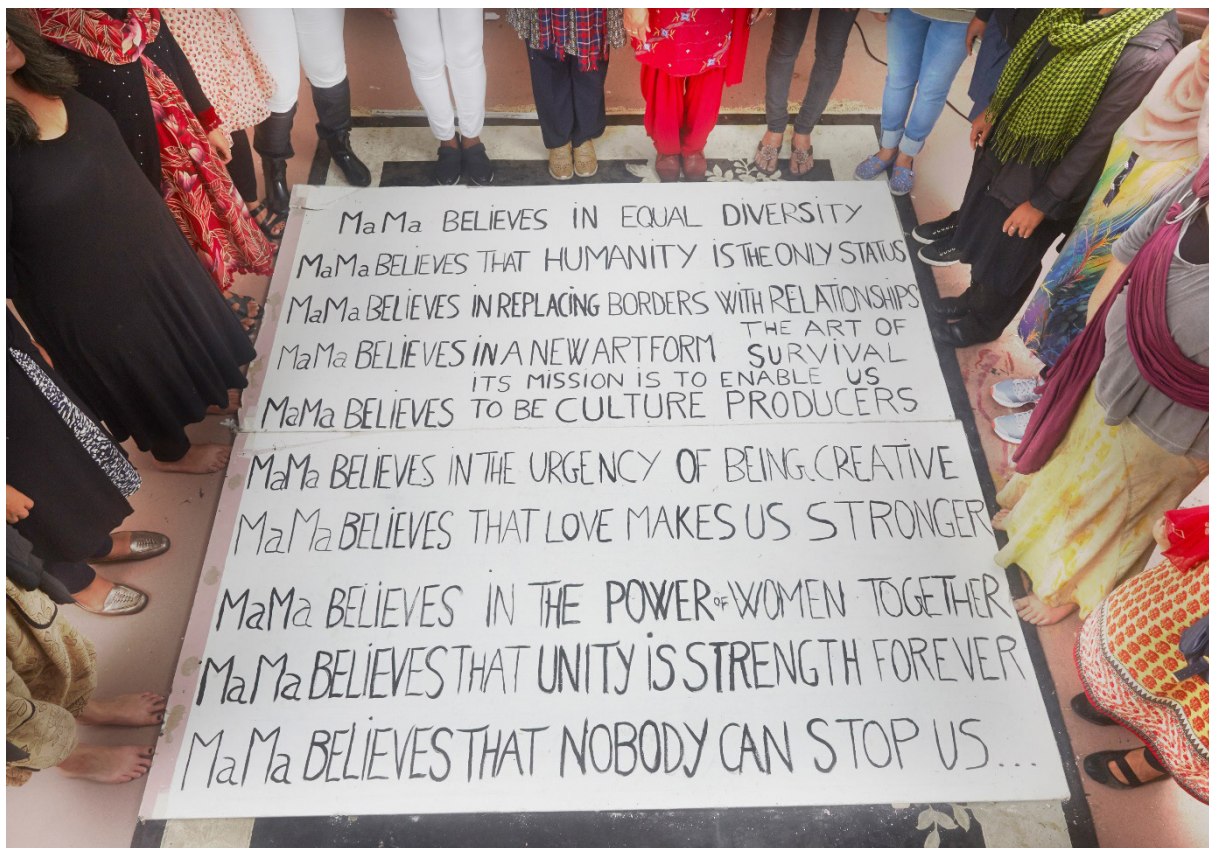
There are hands, and feet, and lips and heads, and hearts, and eyes.

We are experimenting with visual international relations and public relations.

We sing together, and our audiences understand something in the voices of our community of our commitment to each other, we invite them into our community through our music and then we ask them to walk with us on the road to justice. We create a space for them in our narrative.

We are so different from each other that we hope it is possible to see the self in us, to join us. The sound becomes action as the images enter the world and provide fuel for engagement with the democratic structures of the state that controls the migration of humans. The fuel helps us to enter into democracy, to challenge the racism and misogyny of the asylum system.

We begin with we.



In 2011 Lena Simic invited me to work with her on her “Becoming British” project we worked together to devise a new performance “Blood & Soil: We were Always Meant to Meet...” a complex performance piece that traced the embodied reality of memories and dreams of migrant artists juxtaposed with the reality of “Life in the UK” test—an obligatory test for all immigrants applying for British citizenship and for “Indefinite Leave to Remain.” This project enabled me to obtain my permanent leave to remain in the UK.

The most honest thing at that moment for me was to pay it forward and I began working with two other mothers to raise money for her asylum fight to protect her daughter from female genital mutilation and Migrant Artists Mutual Aid (MaMa) was born

Fighting for women refugees seeking sanctuary in the UK is neither quick nor simple. By 2012 MaMa evolved from a small group focusing on sanctuary for one mother, to a larger group of women who met weekly, sang, performed, and fought for justice. This project emerged at a moment when I was trying to understand if we could capture the feeling that we had when we sang, and what that could mean politically.

At the moment, money from the sale of the pictures has funded legal challenges for members who were trafficked for forced marriage and survived domestic slavery. They have not won yet, and we continue to sing.